Birth and christening

As yet the child is nowhere at all; that is, it exists only in another world, — it is only «on its way», the stork has not even put it down, but what a number of anxieties it already causes! Will it be a boy or a girl? . . . Usually the man wishes for a son, the wife for a daughter. But mere wishing is no good; something has to be done about it. If the visitor is fond of the young farmer and wants to please him, he must put his hat on the bed, so that the newborn shall be a boy . . . But after all, whether it be fated to be a boy or a girl, the main thing is that it shall be «something». If a new wife pays a visit, they offer her bread, but not without saying: — «. . . I give you a part of its tail, so that you have a child; I peel it so that it shall be red, I cut it up so that it shall have curly hair . . .» It is a good sign if a glass of water is upset on the table and its contents flow towards the young woman: that means a baptism in the near future . . . Well, let us say that it is certain that «something» will happen, still the great question remains open: will it be a boy or a girl, trousers or skirts, a fillet or spurs; and what will «it» shout when «it» comes into this world, will its first screams be «o-iii o-iii» or «o-aaa o-aaa»? But there are good presages for all this if the young woman finds a pin, if she likes pipe smoke, or if she wishes to eat bacon, then it will be a boy; if she finds a needle, or if she longs for sugar and strawberries, then it will be a girl.

One cannot predict things, but there are enough reliable signs. Even so one has to be careful of every step . . . The young woman must not hide a leaf in her bosom, because a similar mark will show on the child's breast; fruit should not fall on her and, if it does, she must not make a sudden

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843 move to catch it, as that will result in a mark of that fruit
784 on the child. It is unwise to throw meat in the direction of the woman, especially liver, because in that case the child will get freckles . . .

845 When the child is born, everything is settled and
754 solved . . . Whether it be a boy or a girl, it is already a great joy and happiness . . . But a little amazement may get mingled with the joy. If the child happens to be born with teeth . . . it is regarded as a wizard. The Hungarian for wizard is «táltos» which also means horse, and now-a-days it is generally used in that sense. The people sense something magic in the fact that a child is born with teeth ; as soon as this child is grown up, the other «táltos» are supposed to come and fetch it, changing it into a cloud . . . In the clouds the «táltos» fight each other, they see hidden treasures, they are very *learned*, they go on horseback, but even their horses are wizards . . .

754 In 1725 a woman suspected of sorcery was asked from whom she had acquired her knowledge of doctoring and healing ; when, where and how she had learnt it? The woman said that she was a «táltos» ; she had been born with two teeth. «Did you teach other people to become «táltos»? can you tell me what power and what duties the «táltos» have:» — «They fight each other in the sky for empire», the woman replied. «How did you get there? On foot or otherwise?» In reply she explained that God took her under his wings, or gave her wings as he gives them to the birds.

Even in 1801 a man from the Great Plain declares, that he is a «táltos», that he sees the treasures of the earth. He rolls his «evil» eyes in an amazing fashion, he has a glib tongue, elaborates his speech with songs and he has a remarkable gift for reciting Hungarian poems.

Long before these two cases, a Hungarian from the great plain is accused of singing devilish songs, of lighting

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The end of life

761 We are all in God's hands: our time will be up one day, our candle burnt out, our star have vanished from the sky, just as it is set out in the Book of Fate... When the Great Reaper comes, the soul flies away, and the body starts on its last journey.

«There is no medecine against death,
Neither in the Pharmacy, nor else where...»

is one of the ways in which popular songs attempt to
763 console the mourners. When the hour of death has struck, man is drawn to the earth, he longs for it as though contact with it would deliver him from every evil, relieve him from his suffering, ease his last breath... The sick person is taken off the bed, and laid on the floor on a mat covered with a sheet. There he wrestles with death,
[825] until his soul is liberated, and leaves his body. An owl, herald of death, hoots on the chimney: this bird of mourning is supposed to fly away following the dead person's soul, and it comes back with any new-born's soul. Its hoots are a ghostly presage, almost a signpost of the departing soul. People who hear it shudder, yet it is forbidden to cry in the presence of a dieing person, as tears might keep him back, making his departure more difficult; he might not be able to die because his soul would find it too hard to part with life.

761 It is not wise to play with death: the child must not
784 lie on his tummy, the owl must be driven away from the chimney; in our dream we must not have our teeth pulled out, nor must we sing funeral hymns without good reason, nor seat thirteen people at one table...